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ABSTRACT

Summarizing the first year report of a multi-year study of the Food and Nutrition Service's (Department of Agriculture) Child Nutrition Programs, this report describes the programs and methods of the study. Data were collected through telephone interviews with states and School Food Authorities (SFAs) between 1987 and 1992. Findings from 1987-1988 data include the following: (1) approximately 39.7 percent of all school lunches were served free to low income children; (2) 6.6 percent were served at a reduced rate; (3) 53.7 percent were served at full price; (4) National School Lunch Program participation was higher in SFAs offering the School Breakfast Program, in smaller SFAs, and in high-poverty areas; (5) average SFA cost of producing a lunch was $1.43; (6) Food and labor costs accounted for most of production costs; (7) 90 percent of SFAs received donated commodities such as cheese, flour, oil, chicken, and turkey from the federal Food Donation Program; (8) 43 percent of the SFAs that participated in the School Breakfast program cited student nutritional needs as a major concern; and (9) 28 percent of the SFAs felt breakfast was important to children's intellectual functioning. (Includes eight charts.) (JW)

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ED 389 470

Child Nutrition Program Operations Study

First Year Report: Executive Summary

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CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAM OPERATIONS STUDY: First Year Report Executive Summary

Contract No. FNS-53-3198-7-32

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STUDY BACKGROUND

Under contract to the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Abt Associates Inc. (AAI) of Cambridge, MA is conducting a multi-year study of the Child Nutrition Programs. This report presents findings from the first year of the study.

THE CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

The school-based Child Nutrition programs operate in every State in the Nation. They include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Food Donation Program (FDP), the Special Milk Program (SMP), and the Nutrition Education and Training Program (NET). State Administrative Expense (SAE) funding is provided for the NSLP, SBP, and SMP as well as for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Administered by FNS, these programs represent an annual investment of over $4 billion of Federal funds to establish, maintain, and operate non-profit school lunch and breakfast programs for the benefit of the Nation's school children.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To manage the Child Nutrition programs effectively, FNS collects and analyzes information from annual State-level management reports. However, because these State-level reports vary considerably in both format and content, FNS is unable to rely on this source for all of its ongoing information needs. FNS also has many one-time information needs, in order to address current policy issues.

Consequently, FNS contracted with AAI to collect information from School Food Authorities (SFAs) through annual surveys to obtain information on issues that are of interest to FNS. Compared with the alternative of conducting several special-purpose studies, the implementation of an ongoing data collection capability reduces FNS' information collection costs, lessens overall respondent burden, and reduces the length of time required to obtain the needed data.

The first year report describes the Child Nutrition programs and provides details about the methods used in carrying out the study. It presents findings in several areas including program participation, meal prices and meal costs, issues related to the Food Donation Program and the School Breakfast Program, claims reimbursement, use of Food Service Management

Companies, SFA food service program characteristics, and SFA training and technical assistance.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The Child Nutrition Program Operations Study is designed to collect data from States and participating SFAs through annual telephone surveys during School Years (SY) 1988-89, 1989-90, and 1990-91 and through on-site visits during SY 1989-90 and 1991-92, with specific information needs for each data collection effort defined by FNS staff. The surveys provide a "snapshot" of administrative structure and, for selected research items that are included in each multiple surveys, an assessment of year-to-year changes in program operations.

In the first year of the study (SY 1988-89) two data collection components were designed and implemented during the spring of 1989: (1) a survey of all State Agencies and (2) mail and telephone surveys of a nationally-representative sample of 1,740 SFA managers. Data collected from the SFA survey is used to produce national estimates as well as estimates for the following subgroups of SFAs:

- public SFAs,
- private SFAs,
- SFAs that participate in both the NSLP and SBP,
- SFAs that participate only in the NSLP,
- high-poverty SFAs, and
- low-poverty SFAs.

Surveys were successfully completed for 44 States, for a response rate of 88 percent. The telephone survey of SFA managers yielded 1,407 completed interviews for an 81 percent response rate, while the mail survey of SFA managers yielded 1,113 completed interviews for a 64 percent response rate. Potential nonresponse bias was counteracted by weighting the responding sample so that the number of lunches served nationally matches FNS' known universe counts for all SFAs and separately for high- and low-poverty SFAs. Most of the findings from the first year survey are referenced to SY 1988-89. However, some of the findings rely on end-of-year data, and hence reference the previous year (SY 1987-88).

FINDINGS

The major findings for the first year of the study are grouped into the following areas: participation in the NSLP and SBP, meal prices and meal costs, Food Donation Program operations, School Breakfast Program operations, meal counting systems, food service management companies, food service program characteristics, and training and technical assistance.

PARTICIPATION IN THE NSLP AND SBP

FNS has an ongoing interest in measuring and understanding participation in the Child Nutrition Programs because Federal subsidies are tied to the number of meals actually served. This study acquired data on the number of meals served in the NSLP and SBP during SY 1987-88 and used these data to compute National estimates of the number of meals served in each program, as well as to calculate student-level participation rates.

Estimated NSLP and SBP Participation. An estimated 4.0 billion lunches and 604 million breakfasts were served to school children in SY 1989-88. Almost all of the lunches and breakfasts were served in public schools (98 and 99 percent, respectively). Exhibit 1 shows the proportion of lunches and breakfasts served to children who qualified for free, reduced-price, and paid meals. Approximately 39.7 percent of all lunches were served free of charge to children from low income families, 6.6 percent were served at a reduced price, and 53.7 percent were served to children who paid full price for their lunch. Exhibit 1 also shows that almost all breakfasts (83.3 percent) were served free of charge, while 5.2 percent were served at a reduced price, and 11.5 percent were served at full price.

Student Participation Rates. Student participation rates are defined as the ratio of the number of meals served to eligible students during the year to the number of meals that could have been provided. Exhibit 2 shows that overall student participation in the NSLP was estimated to be 59.1 percent for SY 1987-88. That is, on an average day, 59.1 percent of the students who had the NSLP available to them actually participated in the program. This estimate is very close to the figure reported by the first National Evaluation of School Nutrition Programs (NESNP-I) of 61.4 percent[1], and to the estimate of 59.4 percent which can be calculated from FNS' administrative data[2]. NSLP participation rates are also estimated for children in each income-eligibility category: 89.7 percent for children who qualified for free meals, 73.0 percent for children who qualified for reduced-price meals, and 45.6 percent for children who paid full price.

Overall NSLP participation rates were higher in SFAs offering the SBP (63.1 percent), in small SFAs (68.8 percent), and in high-poverty SFAs (66.5 percent) than were participation rates in SFAs without the SBP (54.1 percent), in larger SFAs (57.5 percent), and in low-poverty SFAs (56.0 percent). Participation rates were also higher in elementary schools (71.6 percent) than in secondary schools (48.7 percent).

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[1]Wellisch, J.B. et al,. The National Evaluation of School Nutrition Programs: Final Report. Santa Monica, CA: Systems Development Corporation, 1983.

[2] Annual Historical Review of FNS Programs: Fiscal Year 1988. USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1989.

Exhibit 1

Total NSLP and SBP Participation
(SY 1987 - 88)

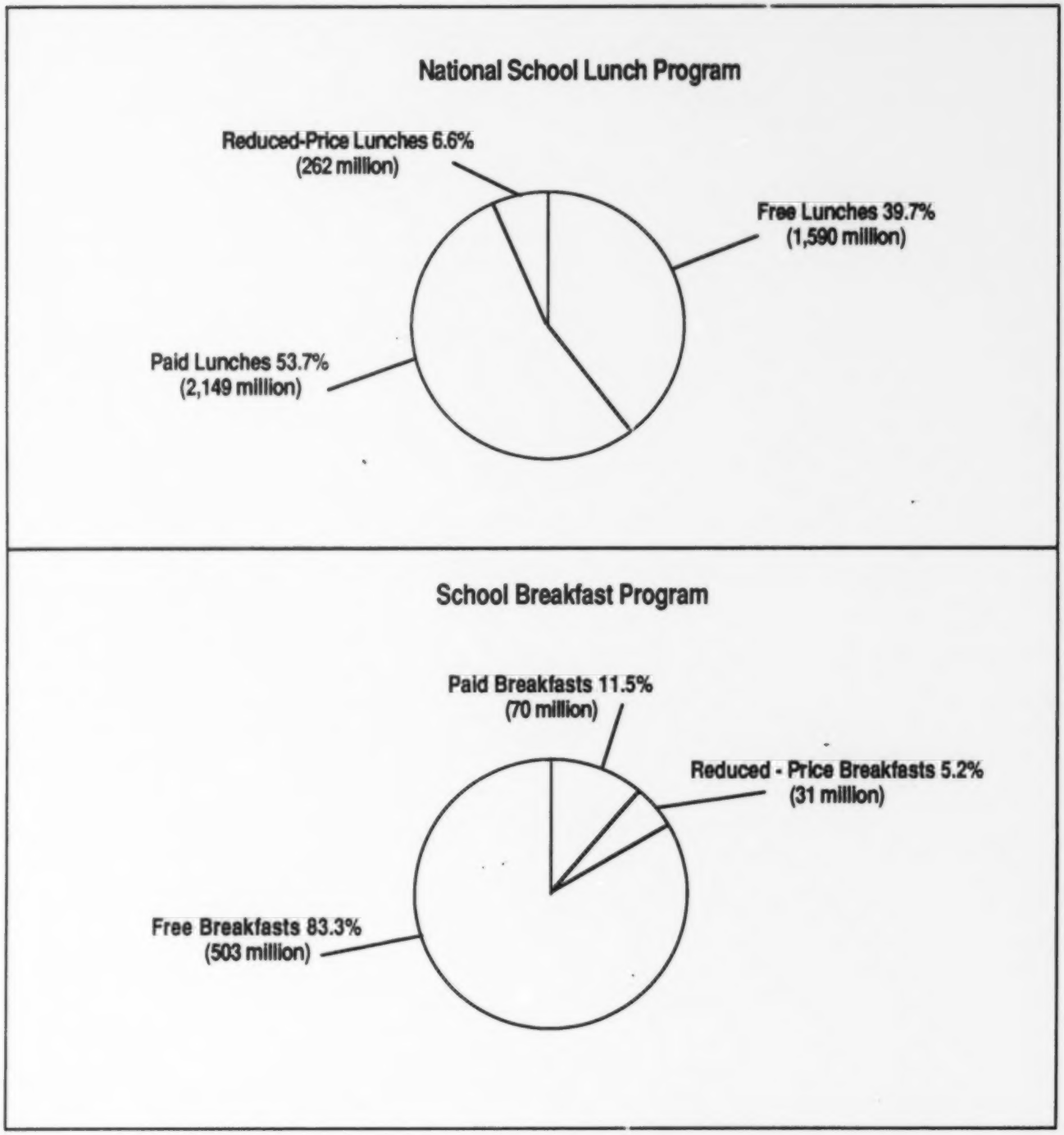


Exhibit 2

NSLP and SBP Student Participation Rates (SY 1987 - 88)

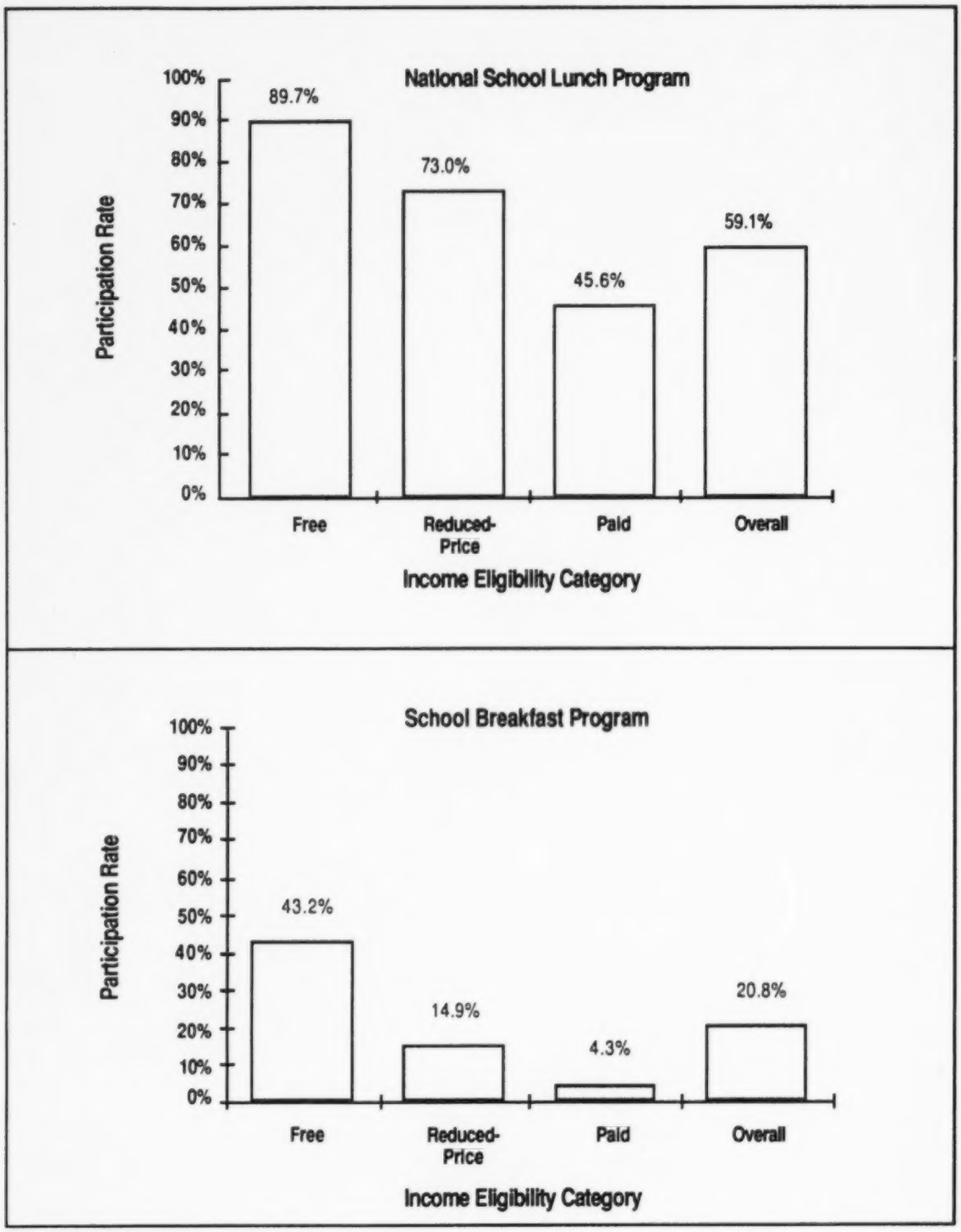


Exhibit 2 also shows that the overall student participation rate in the SBP was estimated to be 20.8 percent for SY 1987-88, almost identical to the estimate of 20.7 percent derived from FNS administrative data. Examined by income-eligibility category, SBP participation rates were 43.2 percent for children who received free meals, 14.9 percent for children who qualified for reduced-price meals, and 4.3 percent for children who paid full price.

MEAL PRICES AND MEAL COSTS

Previous research has shown that the price charged for an NSLP meal is a primary determinant of student participation decisions. This study acquired data on meal prices for SY 1988-89 as well as available historical data on meal prices for the prior five years. The study also examined the cost of producing an NSLP meal, as reported by SFAs.

Meal Prices. The average price for a full-price NSLP meal during SY 1988-89 was $.93 in elementary schools and $1.03 in secondary schools (Exhibit 3). SFAs that participated in the SBP charged lower prices than SFAs that participated only in the NSLP ($.91 vs. $1.00), and high-poverty SFAs charged lower prices than low-poverty SFAs ($.88 vs. $.99). There was substantial variation in the price of a full-price lunch, with about a quarter of all SFAs charging less than $.85, over half charging between $.85 and $1.05, and the remainder charging over $1.05.

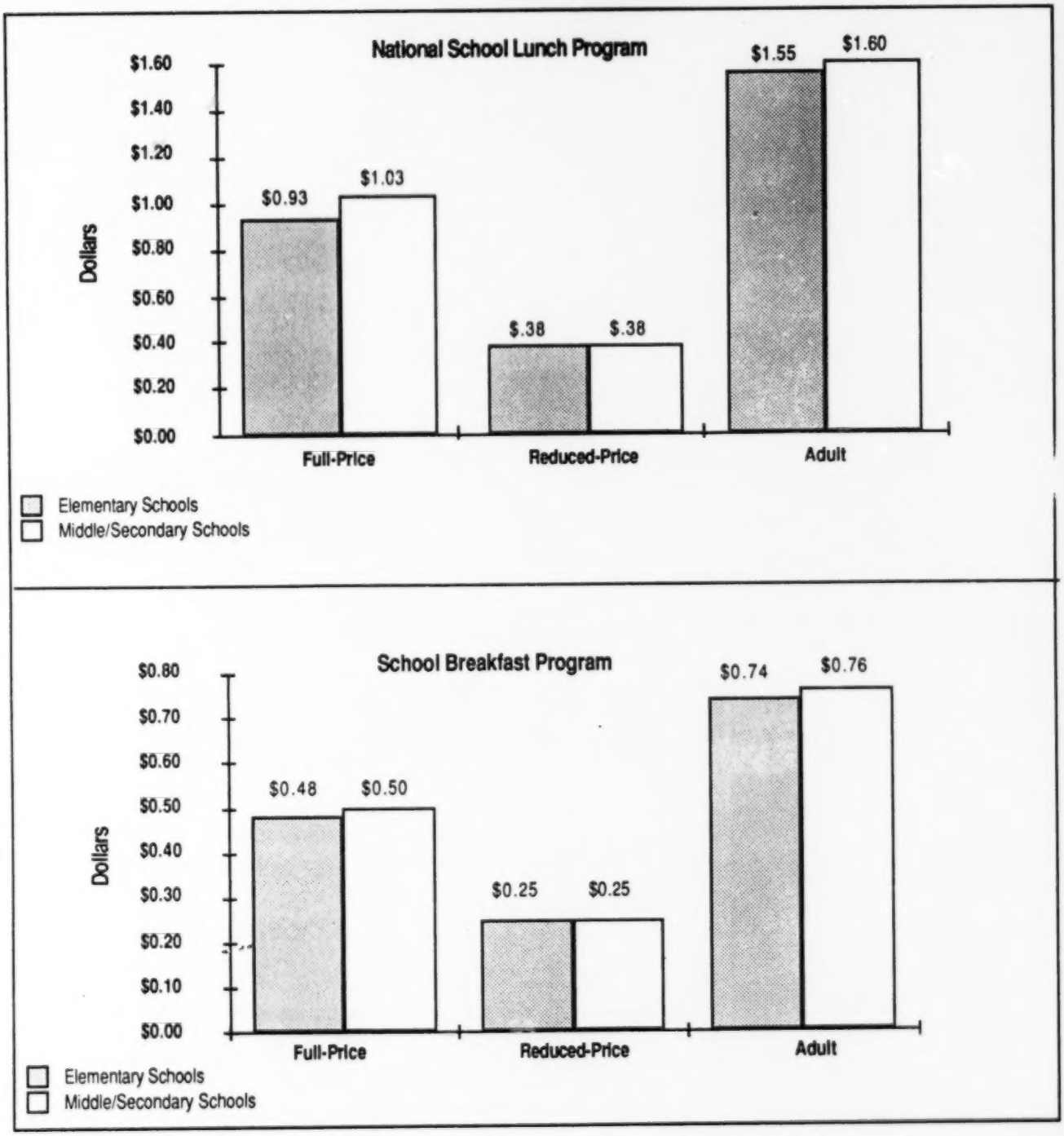
Reduced-price lunches averaged $.38 with very little variation across types of SFAs or across grade levels. In large part this is due to the Federally-set ceiling of $.40 on the price of a reduced-price lunch. The average price for a lunch served to adults in SY 1988-89 was $1.55 in elementary schools and $1.60 in secondary schools. As was the case with full-price lunches, there was substantial variation in the price of adult lunches from SFA to SFA.

The price charged for a paid SBP breakfast in SY 1988-89 was $.48 in elementary schools and $.50 in secondary schools (Exhibit 3). SBP prices were lower in small SFAs than in large SFAs ($.44 vs. $.53) and in high-poverty SFAs than in low-poverty SFAs ($.45 vs. $.51). The average price of a reduced-price SBP breakfast was $.26 with little variation across types of SFAs or across grade levels. Finally, adult breakfast prices averaged $.75 and were higher in private SFAs than in public SFAs ($.93 vs. $.74).

Changes in Lunch Prices. Most SFAs held the price of a paid NSLP meal constant between SY 1987-88 and SY 1988-89. Elementary school prices were increased in 24 percent of SFAs, by an average of $.11, while prices in secondary schools were increased in 32 percent of SFAs, also by an average of $.11. Only two percent of all SFAs raised the price of a reduced-price lunch between SY 1987-88 and SY 1988-89. This is not surprising since 85 percent of all SFAs charged the Federally-set maximum. Finally, the price of an adult lunch was more likely to change than the price of a student lunch. Forty-two percent of all SFAs increased the price of an adult lunch in

Exhibit 3

NSLP and SBP Meal Prices (SY 1988-89)



elementary schools (by an average of $.17) and 46 percent increased prices in secondary schools (by an average of $.16).

During the five-year period from SY 1983-84 to SY 1988-89, 70 percent of all SFAs raised the price of a paid lunch in elementary schools (by an average of $.17) and 81 percent raised the price in secondary schools (by an average of $.19). Over the same five-year period, more than three-quarters of all SFAs held the price of a reduced-price lunch constant both in their elementary and secondary schools, while over 80 percent increased lunch prices for adults.

Changes in the price of paid, reduced-price, and adult breakfasts between SY 1987-88 and SY 1988-89, and over the five-year period from SY 1983-84 to SY 1988-89, were similar in direction to changes in lunch prices.

Reported Meal Costs. To determine the cost of producing an NSLP meal, this study converted breakfasts, adult meals, and a la carte sales into NSLP lunch equivalents (LEQs) using an econometric model of the joint production process used to produce these various cafeteria outputs.

Exhibit 4 shows that the average SFA incurred costs of $1.43 to produce an LEQ in SY1987-88.[3] Production costs per LEQ were higher in large SFAs (average of $1.65) than in small SFAs (average of $1.30) or medium-sized SFAs (average of $1.52).

However, the average cost of producing an LEQ in SY1987-88 was $1.62.[4] This reflects the large number of meals produced in large SFAs, where reported costs per lunch are higher than in other SFAs.

As one would expect, food and labor costs accounted for the vast majority of reported costs (Exhibit 4). Based on the costs incurred by the average SFA, food costs, including the assigned value of donated commodities, accounted for 48 percent of reported costs, ($.68 per LEQ in SY 1987-88). Labor costs accounted for 40 percent of reported costs ($.57 per LEQ). All other costs including supplies, contract services, capital expenditures, indirect charges by the school district, and storage and transportation, represented only 12 percent of reported costs ($.18 per LEQ). Roughly the same distribution of costs is observed when the LEQ is the unit of analysis.

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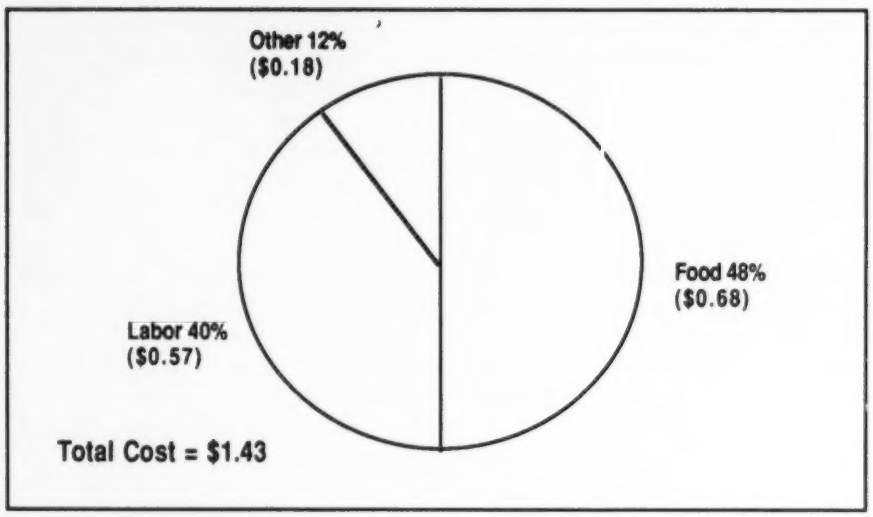
[3]Calculated as the average cost per LEQ across all SFAs in the Nation, i.e., the SFA is the unit of analysis. This analysis gives equal weight to each SFA, regardless of size.

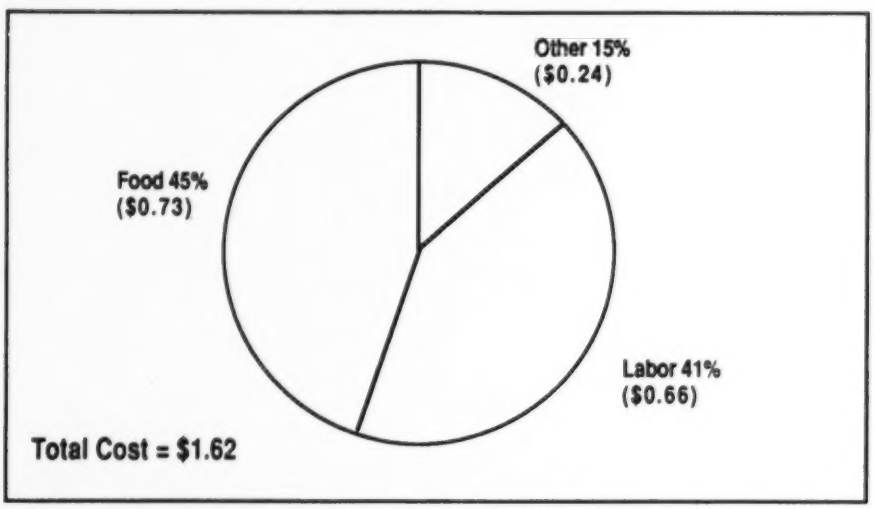
[4]Calculated as the average cost per LEQ across all LEQs served in the Nation, i.e., the LEQ is the unit of analysis. This analysis gives equal weight to each LEQ, and since most LEQs are produced in large SFAs, the results are dominated by the costs incurred in large SFAs.

Exhibit 4

Cost of Lunch in an Average SFA
(SFA is the Unit of Analysis)
(SY 1987-88)



Cost of an Average NSLP Lunch
(NSLP Meal is the Unit of Analysis)
(SY 1987-88)



USDA subsidies to SFAs for the NSLP and SBP include both cash reimbursement and donated commodities. The reimbursement rate for free lunches was $1.405 in SY 1987-88. In addition, SFAs were eligible to receive $0.12 per NSLP lunch in entitlement commodities and, subject to availability, all the bonus commodities that could be used without waste (about $0.08 per NSLP lunch). Therefore, total USDA subsidy for free lunches averaged $1.60 ($1.405 + $0.12 + $0.08). This is about the same as the average reported cost of producing an LEQ ($1.62). It is, however, somewhat greater than the reported cost of producing an LEQ for the average SFA ($1.43).

FOOD DONATION PROGRAM

The Child Nutrition Programs have historically acquired large amounts of surplus agricultural commodities through the FDP. This study obtained data on several aspects of FDP operations in order to help FNS improve program operations.

State-Level Operations. Most (86 percent) of the 44 States that completed the survey were involved in processing donated commodities into various end-products. The products most frequently processed or repackaged under State agreements include cheese, flour and oil, chicken, and turkey. In disbursing processed products to SFAs, States used fee-for-service (84 percent of States), rebate (76 percent), and discount (66 percent) value pass-through systems.

In about half of the States, processing was solely a State-level function, in another one-third of the States, processing occurred at both the State and SFA level, and in the remaining States, processing was either an SFA function or did not occur at all. SFA-level processing was more likely to occur in States that did not have active processing programs, a finding which is consistent with findings from the Study of State Commodity Distribution Systems[5].

SFA-Level Operations. Ninety percent of all SFAs received donated commodities through the FDP. Of those that did participate, 84 percent indicated their preference for the form in which USDA commodities are received--either through direct ordering through States, State surveys, or special meetings or committees. The remaining 16 percent responded that they did not communicate their preferences to States.

Most SFAs reported that USDA commodities were delivered in acceptable condition. Only 17 percent of participating SFAs reported receiving any off-condition commodities during SY 1987-88. When problems did occur, the most frequently cited commodities were dairy products, fruit, and poultry.

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[5] A Study of the State Commodity Distribution Systems, USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1988.

About two-thirds of the SFAs that participated in the FDP obtained some donated commodities in a more usable form through the use of processing. Of these SFAs, 30 percent initiated at least one processing agreement themselves, using commodities such as cheese, beef, flour, chicken, ground beef, and pork, while 68 percent purchased processed end-products under State or National agreements.

SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

For this study FNS requested information on the extent of institutional participation in the SBP, on factors that affected SFAs' and schools' decisions to participate in the SBP, on the extent to which severe-need school participated in the SBP, and on whether the typical breakfast offered in severe-need schools was different from breakfasts provided in other (non-severe-need) schools.

Institutional Participation in the SBP. An estimated 27 percent of all SFAs in the Nation participated in the SBP during SY 1988-89, meaning that they offered the SBP in at least one of their schools. Public SFAs, large SFAs, and high-poverty SFAs were more likely to offer the program than other types of SFAs.

The fact that an SFA participated in the SBP is no guarantee that all of the schools in that SFA offered the program. Almost half (49 percent) of the SFAs that participated in the SBP did not offer the program in all of their schools. Public SFAs, medium and large SFAs, and low-poverty SFAs were most likely to have schools that did not participate in the SBP. FNS program data indicate that the SBP was available in about 40 percent of all NSLP schools and to approximately 38 percent of all school-age children in the Nation.

Forty-three percent of the SFAs that participated in the SBP cited the nutritional needs of the students as a major reason for participation; 30 percent cited the poverty level of students as an influential factor, and 28 percent felt that eating breakfast was important for childrens' intellectual functioning.

The primary reasons that schools in participating SFAs did not offer the program were either logistical in nature or were related to a known or anticipated lack of interest. The most common reasons for non-participation were that the school had difficulty opening early (27 percent), the school expected low student participation (21 percent), there was a lack of transportation (17 percent), and the school board lacked interest (14 percent).

Participation Among Severe-Need Schools. Approximately half (48 percent) of all SFAs participating in the SBP during SY 1988-89 had at least one school that was eligible for severe-need reimbursement. While most of the eligible schools received the intended severe-need reimbursement, 26 percent of SFAs had one or more eligible schools that did not--the survey results estimate that 2,488 schools fell into this category. Most of these schools (65 percent) did not apply for the additional reimbursement because of the cost

accounting requirements, because the school was unable to offer the program, or because the school "did not need the extra money."

Characteristics of SBP Meals. A wide variety of breakfast foods were available to students in the SBP during SY 1988-89. The typical SBP meal included milk (not chocolate), citrus juice, and either iron-fortified cold cereal or some type of bread or roll. The vast majority of SFAs (86 percent) offered some hot food, and more than half of the participating SFAs offered some choice in selecting breakfast foods.

Seventy-six percent of the SFA managers in districts with at least one severe-need school reported that they provided "enhanced" breakfasts. Thirty-one percent of SFAs that provided enhanced breakfasts served those breakfasts in all of their schools, regardless of whether the schools were eligible for severe-need reimbursement.

Breakfasts served in SFAs with severe-need schools were somewhat more likely to include hot foods, especially hot cereal, pancakes and waffles, eggs, bacon, ham, sausage, or cheese than breakfasts served in SFAs with no severe-need schools. However, breakfasts served in SFAs with severe-need schools were less likely to offer a choice of items to students.

MEAL COUNTING SYSTEMS

To ensure that reimbursement claims are accurate, all SFAs are required to have in place a mechanism for counting the number of meals served to children in each meal reimbursement category. However, audits conducted by the USDA Office of the Inspector General and administrative reviews performed by FNS indicate that, while most schools and SFAs operate in an accountable manner, there are problems with the NSLP meal accountability and claiming procedures used in some schools and SFAs [6].

Meal Counting Systems. Over two-thirds of SFAs used two or more meal counting systems during SY 1988-89. The most popular system, used in 54 percent of SFAs, involved the use of coded tickets that indicate a child's eligibility status. Forty-six percent of SFAs had schools that provided lists to cashiers which identified children by name along with their related eligibility status. Other less-common systems included classroom counts that may or may not be verified at the point of service, attendance records, and ID card scanners.

Monitoring Meals for Reimbursability. In order for a meal counting system to be fully accurate, the system must ensure that only reimbursable meals are counted. SFA managers reported that such a monitoring system was in place

[6] Federal Review Final Report. USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis and Evaluation, February, 1990.

in virtually all (99 percent) public schools. The recent Federal Review of this issue found that the meal counting systems in 15 percent of public schools did not yield an adequate count of reimbursable meals. The discrepancy between the two studies (1 percent vs. 15 percent) is probably due to the fact that the Federal Review results were based on on-site observations while the data from the present study reflect school policy as reported by the SFA manager, and actual practice may vary from written policy.

Monitoring Meal Counts. The accuracy of meal counts was monitored at both the school and the SFA level during SY 1988-89. Meal count accuracy was monitored in 94 percent of all schools, most often on a daily basis by food service personnel. The most common approach was a simple comparison of the number of meals claimed in each category with the number of students approved for free and reduced-price meals.

At the SFA level, 85 percent of SFAs monitored individual schools. The most common monitoring approach, used by 96 percent of SFAs, was to compare meal counts against the number of approved applications for each meal reimbursement category. Seventy-two percent of SFAs compared meal counts to attendance records, a method that probably provides a better cross-check since reviewers are able to identify eligible-but-absent children.

Accuracy of Reported Meal Counts. Data from FNS' Federal Review showed that schools claim 80 free meals for every 100 applications on file (claiming ratio = .80). In the present study, the average claiming ratio for SY 1987-88 was quite comparable, at .81. More than half (53 percent) of the schools in this study had claiming ratios above .85, 16 percent had claiming ratios above .95, and 7 percent exceeded 1.0.

These claiming ratios do not consider attendance, and thus may underestimate the likelihood of overclaiming. When attendance is taken into consideration, 41 percent of all schools had claiming ratios in excess of .95 and 26 percent had ratios above 1.0. These percentages are somewhat higher than those found in the FNS Federal Review study, probably because the present study includes a larger proportion of elementary schools, which do have higher claiming ratios than secondary schools.

FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT COMPANIES (FSMCs)

The use of FSMCs is on the rise in agencies that administer the Child Nutrition Programs. While FNS is aware of the approximate number of SFAs that contract with FSMCs, limited information is available on how SFAs actually use these for-profit companies, how SFAs select contractors, and the methods used to monitor performance.

An estimated 7 percent of SFAs (1,011 SFAs) employed a FSMC during SY 1988-89. When FSMCs were used, they participated at some level in virtually all major functions involved in administering school nutrition programs. Ninety percent or more of SFAs that used FSMCs delegated the

responsibility for selecting vendors, determining prices and specifications, setting delivery dates, and planning and developing menus. The majority of SFAs that used FSMCs in SY 1988-89 (63 percent) paid a flat administrative fee. Thirty-five percent of SFAs reported use of a per-meal rate to determine or adjust the fee.

Decisions about FSMCs are almost always made by a local School Board, and FSMCs are almost always monitored. The ability to provide acceptable, high-quality meals is the most important factor in evaluating the performance of FSMCs.

FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Several topics related to food service operations were addressed in this study including food purchasing procedures, kitchen facilities and meal service systems, use of SFA facilities for programs other than the NSLP and SBP, use of the offer vs. serve (OVS) option in elementary schools, and nutritional analysis of menus.

Food Purchasing Procedures. Thirty-seven percent of SFAs used a competitive bid process in selecting all or most of their food vendors; 32 percent used competitive bids only for their largest orders, most often bread, milk, and ice cream; and 25 percent of SFAs never used competitive bids.

Only 23 percent of SFAs participated in purchasing cooperatives in SY 1988-89. Among those that did participate, the foods most frequently purchased included canned goods, staple items, and frozen foods.

Kitchen Facilities and Meal Service System. During SY 1988-89, 55 percent of SFAs operated exclusively with on-site kitchens, 22 percent used one or more base kitchens or a central kitchen to prepare meals for satellite or receiving kitchens, and combinations of two or more types of kitchen facilities were used in 23 percent of SFAs.

Most meals served in the NSLP and SBP were prepared and served in bulk. That is, foods were prepared in large quantities and served to individual children as they passed through a cafeteria line. Sixty-four percent of SFAs relied exclusively on bulk meal service, 11 percent used bulk meal service in combination with some type of pre-packaged meal service, and 10 percent used pre-packaged meals exclusively.

Use of SFA Facilities for Other Programs. During SY 1988-89, 28 percent of SFAs used their food service facilities for programs other than the NSLP and SBP: 15 percent prepared meals for elderly feeding sites, 12 percent provided NSLP and SBP meals for other SFAs, 11 percent served meals to day care centers participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and 10 percent provided meals for the Summer Food Service Program.

Availability of Alternative Food Services. Children in middle-secondary schools had considerably more food alternatives available to them than children in elementary schools. A la carte lunch items were available more frequently in middle/secondary schools than in elementary schools (78 percent vs. 32 percent), as were a la carte breakfast items (41 percent vs. 18 percent). Vending machines and snack bars were also more prevalent in middle/secondary schools than in elementary schools. Forty-eight percent of SFAs had vending machines and 35 percent of SFAs had snack bars available in secondary schools, while only 5 percent of SFAs had either of these options available in elementary schools. Finally, off-campus meal privileges were not widespread either in elementary (20 percent) or in middle/secondary schools (30 percent).

Offer vs. Serve in Elementary Schools. Approximately 64 percent of SFAs used the OVS option in elementary schools during SY 1988-89. Choice among NSLP entrees was available to middle/secondary school students in 75 percent of SFAs and to elementary school students in 40 percent of SFAs.

Nutritional Analysis of Menus. More than two-thirds of all SFAs analyzed the nutritional content of their menus in SY 1988-89. While only 9 percent used a computer-based system, 56 percent of all SFA managers indicated that they would be interested in receiving information on computer programs that facilitate nutritional analysis.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Training and technical assistance are used in the Child Nutrition Programs to ensure that programs operate efficiently, that they comply with Federal regulations and policies, and that nutrition, high-quality meals are served to school children.

Training and Technical Assistance Provided by State Agencies. In SY 1988-89, all of FNS' State Agencies provided training or technical assistance related to menu planning, recordkeeping, and program regulations and procedures. Over 90 percent of all States also included food purchasing, food sanitation and safety, food preparation, merchandising, and use of commodities in their training and technical assistance programs. Technical assistance related to contracting procedures was not as consistently available, being offered by 70 percent of the States.

Over half (55 percent) of the States reported an increase in the level of training and technical assistance activities over the prior three years, while 36 percent reported no change and 9 percent reported a decrease.

Training and Technical Assistance Received by SFAs. Over half (51 percent) of all SFAs received some training or technical assistance during SY 1988-89. The topics most frequently covered were program regulations and procedures, and food sanitation and safety.